

RED SOX

Time for Red Sox to start Xander Bogaerts, bench Stephen Drew

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It's hard to pick on one player in a lineup filled with futile production, but it's time for **John Farrell** to make a change.

The Red Sox manager has watched as the left side of his infield has gone a combined 2-for-23 against Tigers pitching in the now best-of-three American League Championship Series. After another frustrating, hitless evening, shortstop **Stephen Drew** is batting .077 (1-for-13) with a .220 OPS in his four games, while striking out six times and walking just once. Third baseman **Will Middlebrooks** is hitting a mere .100 (1-for-10) with a .300 OPS and five strikeouts.

Embarrassing numbers all-around.

On the surface, you could flip a coin to decide which player should ride the pine in tonight's Game 5 against **Anibal Sanchez** in order to make room for hungry and offensively opportunistic rookie **Xander Bogaerts**, but whose benching makes the most sense?

The answer is Drew. It's *absolutely* Drew.

The veteran has looked lifeless at the plate throughout the playoffs, hitting .107 (3-for-28) with a .317 OPS and eight strikeouts, and his only two RBI came versus the Rays in the ALDS. More problematic, Boston has left 58 men on base through eight games and Drew has personally stranded 21 (to Middlebrooks' six). It's consistently been a problem in big spots.

In the ALCS opener, Drew struck out swinging against Sanchez with the bases loaded and the Red Sox down a run in the sixth. Inning over, and the game ended in a 1-0 Tigers win. Against **Doug Fister** in Game 4 on Wednesday, the shortstop fanned in a scoreless second inning with a runner on third to, once more, end a threat. Drew struck out yet again with Detroit up 7-1 in the sixth, two men on, and Boston attempting to rally.

One potential game-changing opportunity after another, Drew has failed. He's not alone, of course; **David Ortiz** (his Game 2 grand slam notwithstanding), **Shane Victorino**, and **Dustin Pedroia** are among several in the midst of struggles. But that's no excuse.



Bogaerts is ready, and he has been for a long time. No situation, even the pressure-cooker that is the postseason, seems to faze him.

The barely 21-year-old infielder has enjoyed four plate appearances in the playoffs and he's reached base three times with a double and two crucial walks in a series-clinching victory in Tampa. He's also scored four runs. Drew and Middlebrooks have combined to score three.

Asked point-blank after the Red Sox' 7-3 loss last night if he'd start Bogaerts, something that has yet to happen in the postseason, Farrell said, "Haven't made a decision on tomorrow's lineup but, given the way the left side of the infield – you know, we're struggling a little bit to get some production out of that side. So it's something that's being considered, for sure."

Interpret that however you'd like, but it would be awfully surprising if Bogaerts isn't penciled in the starting nine this evening. Granted, he's never faced Sanchez in his brief career, but he entered Game 4 as a defensive replacement and led off the ninth inning with an opposite field, ground-rule double off **Joaquin Benoit** before, you guessed it, coming around to score. Even after sitting most of the night, he was ready to be a difference-maker.

That brings us back to the coin-flip. If Bogaerts plays, which struggling batter sits?

Yes, it could be argued that Drew's glove is more important to the defense than what Middlebrooks provides at the hot corner, or that it's beneficial that Drew has some familiarity with Sanchez (batting .227 with a .626 OPS and 3 RBI in 22 career at-bats) while Middlebrooks is hitless in just two opportunities.

But Middlebrooks, unlike Drew, provides the potential for power (a home run every 19.8 at-bats vs. righties this year) in an offense that may finally be starting to click after it amassed a dozen hits the last time out. He's also having a slightly better postseason with a .174 average and .530 OPS, not that those are numbers to brag about.

Ultimately, giving Bogaerts a shot, sitting Drew, and hoping Middlebrooks can find his way out of his funk makes the most sense.

Will Farrell view it the same way, or remain loyal to his veteran?

Source :

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